

FAITHFUL TO THE END

The evening sun was casting its long, slender rays over the hills of Laketown, as Everett Gordon and Catherine Stirling slowly pursued their way homeward. On arriving at the house they did not enter, but remained in the garden to engage in quiet conversation.

Many hours of their childhood were spent playing in this same place, but never were they so happy as on this occasion, for now they realized, for the first time, that they were held together by a stronger bond than that of the childish friendship that had existed between them so long.

Supper was ready at the home of Charles Stirling, and the family were awaiting the return of Everett and Catherine.

"What in the world can be keeping those two?" said Mrs. Stirling to her husband, "It is now after six o'clock."

"They will soon be home," was the reply, "Do not worry about them."

"Charles," said Mrs. Stirling, "I perceive of late that Gordon's attitude towards Catherine is entirely changed. They no longer play together as children, but act as though they were really in love with each other. I think we must do something to prevent this before it is too late; for, how could we allow our daughter to keep company with, or marry a man like Everett, with no home, or social position. You have already done your duty towards him, so now why not send him away to provide for himself?"

"This I cannot, and will not do," said her husband, "For at the death-bed of my poor friend Francis Gordon I promised that I would take his place as regards his young son, and would he, if he were living, send him out into the world alone?"

"It is a good policy to be faithful to your promises," replied his wife, "but you must remember that our daughter's welfare is at stake; and if you will not consent to send

him away, we must use precautions in the future as will tend to keep them separated, and thus prevent them from becoming more intimate."

From that time forward, it was so arranged that those two who had spent so many happy hours together, saw each other very seldom.

Charles Stirling, influenced by his wife, sent Everett to take charge of one of his factories, some distance away; thus enabling him to spend his weekends in town, and on these occasions, Mrs. Stirling planned that her daughter should be absent visiting friends, and always found some excuse to keep her away from home.

Some years passed on, until, at the outbreak of the South African war, the cry for men resounded all over England.

One evening at supper, Everett said to Mr. Stirling, "I think I shall have to give up the factory business, for I am going to join the army. I know that it will seem very ungrateful of me to leave you now, after the kindness you have shown towards me, but, when duty calls, we must disregard even such things as these."

After some deliberation, Stirling saw that it was impossible to dissuade his young ward from the resolution he had taken, and, although he was unwilling to see the boy whom he liked so well, go away, yet he gave his consent.

The saying that "absence makes the heart grow fonder" was very true in the case of Everett and Catherine; for, so far was their separation from causing them to forget the past, that they grew even fonder of each other; and on the evening of his departure she accompanied him to the barracks where he was to join his comrades.

Both were comparatively silent on this lonely journey for want of words to express the deep feelings and emotion that filled their hearts.

Catherine's parting words to her friend, as she bade him a fond farewell, were, that no matter what should hap-

pen before his return, she would be always true and faithful to him.

She asked the same of him, and promised that he would write to her as often as circumstances would permit.

Mrs. Stirling thought now that Everett was gone, that she could manage the rest herself, and her daughter would forget all about the one she loved.

But Catherine could not allow the thought of him to be absent from her mind for one moment, and anxiously watched for the arrival of the first letter; and, although it was but a note written at the port from which they were to sail, she read it more than once, and was glad to know that Everett had not forgotten his promise. Catherine experienced the state of mind ensuing from loneliness, augmented by disappointment, when a week, a fortnight, and even a month passed by without the arrival of the letters which she awaited each morning with anxious expectation.

"What can be the trouble," she would say to herself, "has he really forgotten me so soon? No it could not be; Everett would be faithful to the end."

Although she carefully watched the arrival of the mail each day, there was one who watched even more closely—and that was her mother.

Mrs. Stirling took special care to destroy all the letters that came for her daughter from Everett; and, although Mr. Stirling had heard from him at frequent intervals, yet in her conversations with Catherine concerning the "Soldier boy," as she called him, she expressed wonder that he had never written to any of the family.

After a year had passed, when she saw that her plan had worked so well, she thought the best thing she could do now, would be to write to Everett. So, assuming her daughter's hand-writing, she wrote a formal note, saying that since he had gone away, she began to realize better that her love for him was but a childish fancy, that it had not endured the test of time; and that although she was still his friend, and would always continue to be, still she

would not answer his letters that he might soon learn to forget the past.

Even as Catherine had waited, Everett had looked for a letter from the one who promised to be true to him; but whatever cause he attributed to the delay, he never thought of doubting her love until he received the note written by Mrs. Stirling.

This shock seemed almost unbearable. He was hurt and disappointed. His great ambitions as a soldier, which had always been noted by his companions fell. He performed his duties almost mechanically, for he thought he had nothing more to work for.

But then his pride rose to rebuke him and he thought, "Why should I worry so much over one who has been untrue; over one who has forgotten me."

Nevertheless, he forgave her, for he convinced himself that he was not worthy to be remembered by a person of Catherine's rank, and finally decided to write her his last letter.

Catherine's hope and confidence never deserted her, and when, one morning she recognized Everett's handwriting on an envelope addressed to her, she thought, "Now, at last, I have been paid for my perseverance."

With trembling hands she broke open the seal. What could it be? Was it that he would soon be home, or had conditions over there prevented him from writing sooner.

In her mind, she pictured Everett the same handsome trustworthy boy she had known in the days gone by, and she was happy in the anticipation of reading the kind words she had waited for so long.

All was suddenly changed when she drew out the folded sheet and read:

Farewell forever,

Everett Gordon

For a moment she could scarcely believe her senses; the words swam before her eyes. Presently she found re-

lief in tears, and, locking herself in her room, she remained there till evening.

When she came down to supper, her mother sought for an explanation for her haggard and worn-out expression, and when she heard the story, said in sympathetic tones, "I knew it would turn out like this; you never understood Everett as I did, or you would have known that he would forget all about you when he was gone. Think no more about it, child, but brighten up, for you have your life to live just the same."

This parley did not lessen Everett in Catherine's estimation, for she still refused to be comforted by her mother's sham sympathy, and spent most of her time alone. In thinking of the future she could see no light through the heavy cloud before her, the only consolation she could find was in pondering over the happiness of the past.

After a time a young lawyer of prominent rank and high social standing began to make frequent visits to the Stirling home, and sought to make Catherine's friendship. But although she felt that there was no further reason to wait for Everett's return, she could not allow any one else to take his place in her affections, and gave her new friend but little encouragement to continue his visits.

Mrs. Stirling who thought very highly of the lawyer, never ceased to persuade her daughter that her conduct was but folly, and as time gradually wore away the effects of her grief and disappointment Catherine began to look more favorably upon him.

She also found in his company a means whereby she might the more easily forget her past sorrows; and when afterwards he asked for her hand in marriage, she said, "I cannot tell you now, but I shall think it over, and within a month I shall give you my answer."

After two years of service, Everett received a wound which rendered him unfit for further military work, and consequently, he was discharged from duty.

Before going to Canada, where he intended to make his

future home, he decided to visit once more the scenes of his boyhood days and to bid farewell to his kind old guardian who had done so much for him.

He did not intend to call at the old home, but went to a hotel where he phoned Mr. Stirling to meet him.

No sooner was he inside the building when a large car stopped at the door, and a young lady alighted who entered the hotel. He recognized her immediately. He did not think she would notice him, and in fact did not intend to speak to her. But whatever the lady would have done, had she time in her excitement to consider, she immediately rushed towards him, and extending her hand cried out, "Oh Everett!"

He did not accept the hand that was offered him, and both were so overcome by surprise that they could not utter a word. Finally Everett broke the silence.

"I do not understand, Catherine, why you should be so anxious to greet me now, while during my absence you thought so little about me, and did not even answer my letters."

"Your letters! What in the world do you mean? You wrote me but once—that awful farewell note that I shall never forget. Oh! please tell me why you sent me this."

"I did not until I received yours first," and pulling a bundle of letters from his pocket he showed her the one to which he referred.

"I never wrote this," she said. In an instant she saw the whole affair; she saw how she had been deceived, and who had deceived her; she saw an explanation of the letters she had written and the fate of those that Everett had sent her.

In a few short words she explained the matter, then, grasping her hand he exclaimed, "My dear, forgive me, Why have I mistrusted you; should I not have known that you were not to blame. You have been true; you have been faithful to your promise."